

Florida Food Fare

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Thyme

Description: There are over 100 varieties of this member of the mint family. Thyme is a perennial herb native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean. Garden thyme, the variety most people are familiar with, is a bush that grows six to twelve inches high. It's narrow, pale gray-green leaves give off a pungent, minty, light lemon aroma. It grows in areas where there is plenty of sun and good drainage. Drought conditions tend to concentrate the oils, producing a more potent herb. The most common variety of the Wild thyme is lemon thyme, a compact upright shrub that grows to about twelve inches. The leaves are tiny and heart shaped, ringed with a splash of yellow and as the name suggests a more pronounced lemon aroma.

Availability: Thyme is available year round as dried leaves or powder. Some supermarkets carry fresh thyme during the summer months. Leaves can be harvested for fresh use throughout the summer, but the flavor is best just before flowering. Harvest sparingly the first year.

Storage and Use: To dry fresh thyme, cut the stems just as the flowers start to open and hang in small bunches. As with all herbs, it should be stored in a cool dark place. It is widely used in cooking as the flavor blends well with other herbs without overpowering them. Thyme is a basic herb of French cuisine and best known as one of the primary components in a classic bouquet garni. When combined with fresh sprigs of parsley and bay leaves, it enhances the flavor

of soups, stews and sauces. It is a favorite seasoning for lamb and pork. When cooking with thyme, be sure to add it early in the process so the oils have time to be released.

Thyme has long been known for its medicinal qualities. It was grown in monastery gardens in Europe during the middle ages for use as a cough remedy and digestive aid. Today thymol, its most active ingredient is used in over-the-counter products for cough and respiratory congestion.

Recipes:

Marigold and Mint Potpourri

For fragrance and room enhancement only; not to eat!

1 cup dried marigold flowers	3/4 cup leaf basil
1 cup leaf thyme	1 cup coarse salt
1 1/4 cup whole peppermint leaves	

Blend herbs and salt carefully being careful not to crush the herbs. Mix in marigolds. Let ripen in jars with tight fitting lids, away from light and heat for 4-6 weeks. Then place in a decorative jar with a tight fitting lid. When ready to use, open jar, stir potpourri gently and leave the cover off for awhile. Replace cover when not in use.

Chicken and Corn Chowder with Thyme

6 slices bacon, diced	4 cups frozen corn
4 scallions, diced	4 chicken breasts diced
1 onion chopped	3 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme
2 (14.5 ounce) cans chicken broth	2 cups fat free half and half
2 large potatoes diced	salt and pepper to taste

In a large pot, cook bacon until crisp. Remove and set aside. Drain all but 3 tablespoons of the bacon fat from the pan. Sauté the onions in the bacon fat. Add broth and the potato to the pot. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Add corn, chicken and thyme. Cover, simmer until the chicken is cooked and the vegetables are tender, about 15- 20 minutes. Stir half and half into the soup, simmer for 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Ladle into bowls, and sprinkle with bacon and scallions. Serves 4-6.

Lemon-Thyme Pesto

2/3 cup packed stemmed fresh parsley	1 tablespoon grated lemon peel
1/4 cup pine nuts	1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon ground dried thyme	1/4 cup olive oil

Blend first 5 ingredients until almost smooth in food processor or blender. With machine running, gradually add oil and process until smooth. If too dry, add more oil by spoonfuls. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate 2 or 3 days. Bring to room temperature before using.

Jerk Marinade for Chicken

1/2 cup oil	1/4 cup red wine vinegar
1 large onion, chopped fine	2 tablespoons brown sugar
2 green onions, chopped fine	1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and minced	1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons minced ginger	pinch ground cloves
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme	1 teaspoon allspice
2 cloves garlic, minced	1 tablespoon fresh lime juice

Combine all ingredients. May be made a day in advance and refrigerated. Makes about 1 1/2 cups. Chicken pieces may be marinated overnight or just a few hours. Grill chicken until no longer pink inside, basting with marinade occasionally. Discard any leftover marinade.